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SUBJECT: ZAGREB WEEKLY ACTIVITY REPORT - MARCH 27, 2008

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11. (U) CROATIAN SERB PARTY TO REMAIN IN GOVERNMENT:
The Independent Democratic Serb Party (SDSS) has decided to remain a coalition partner in the Croatian Government despite its disagreement with the government's decision on March 19 to recognize Kosovo. On March 26, the SDSS leadership met to review the party's continued participation in the government. The party noted that it still disagrees with the Government's recognition of Kosovo, but decided to stay in the government and keep the coalition agreement in force. SDSS President Vojislav Stanimirovic was quoted in the press that the problems of Croatian Serbs had to be a higher priority for the party than the status of Kosovo. "Becoming (the) opposition would create new problems for us and would push us several years backward," added party vice president Milorad Pupovac. SDSS representative Slobodan Uzelac, who had offered his resignation immediately after the recognition decision, will therefore remain a Deputy Prime Minister. (ZTomic)

12. (U) WAR CRIME TRIALS MEET INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS BUT COULD IMPROVE IN SOME AREAS:
A report by a group of respected local NGOs on the conduct of War Crime Trials in Croatia during 2007 found that the vast majority of monitored trials met basic international standards for fair and unbiased trials. However, the report did call for some improvements including: strengthening the investigating centers of four County Courts (Zagreb, Osijek, Rijeka and Split); intensifying investigation efforts; increasing witness and victim support; and further strengthening cooperation with neighboring states. In response to the NGO report, Minister of Justice Ana Lovrin cited improvements in judicial proceedings, and specifically mentioned the utilization of video conference systems for testimony. (NOTE: The digital video conference systems at the four largest Croatian County courts adjudicating war crimes (Zagreb, Osijek, Rijeka and Split) as well as the Vukovar County court, which has the largest number of domestic war crime cases were all provided through USG assistance.) Minister Lovrin said that further education on the use of the systems will be organized through the Judicial Academy. At the conference presenting the report, which garnered significant national media attention, Croatia's Chief State Prosecutor also reiterated his determination to prosecuting every war crime committed in Croatia regardless of the defendants' ethnicity. (VDjukic)

13. (SBU) WHITE HOUSE ADVANCE TEAM ARRIVES ZAGREB:
Members of the White House advance team began arriving in Zagreb this week and have begun intense preparations for the President's up-coming visit. The advance team held an

orientation meeting on March 27 with Embassy Zagreb staff supporting the visit. Together, Embassy and White House staff have begun visiting various sites to prepare for the arrival and visits of the President and First Lady. Meanwhile, President Bush's interview with the Croatian news agency HINA was given good coverage. Two of the largest circulation dailies ran the interview with headlines noting that NATO was not seeking military bases in Croatia. (PMcCabe) Bradtke